

News from the Wyoming Department of Health

Wednesday, June 9, 2010

Department Offers Flood-Related Health Advice

A state health official says residents and volunteers in areas of Wyoming with flooding should be mindful of potential flood-related health concerns that can sometimes develop.

Flood conditions in Wyoming are being monitored by local and state health officials for any emerging public health threat, according to Dr. Tracy Murphy, state epidemiologist with the Wyoming Department of Health.

Murphy said during and after a flood, water can sometimes become contaminated with microorganisms such as bacteria, sewage, agricultural or industrial waste, chemicals and other substances.

“Unfortunately, contaminated water, even a small amount, can cause illness in some cases,” Murphy said. “So we’re asking folks in those areas to be cautious and to pay attention to any health-related announcements from local and state health authorities.”

Murphy offered the following information:

Safe Drinking Water

Residents who receive their water from a city or other public water supply source should watch and listen for public announcements about the safety of their water and follow the specific advice offered.

Flooded private water wells can sometimes make the water drawn from that well unsafe. People who receive their water from a private well that has been flooded should not drink the water or use it to wash dishes, brush teeth, wash and prepare food, make ice, make baby formula or otherwise use for human consumption without taking precautions.

Safe water for human consumption includes bottled water or water that has been boiled for at least three minutes.

Flooded, private water wells will need to be tested and disinfected after flood waters recede.

Flood Waters

Although skin contact with flood water does not, by itself, pose a serious health risk, there is some risk of disease from eating or drinking anything contaminated with flood water.

Wash hands with soap and water that has not been contaminated, or has been boiled or otherwise disinfected or use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer before preparing or eating food, after toilet

use, after participating in flood cleanup activities, and after handling articles contaminated with flood water or sewage.

Keep open cuts or sores that may be exposed to flood water as clean as possible by washing well with soap and safe water to control infection. If a wound develops redness, swelling or drainage, see a medical professional.

Do not eat food that may have come into contact with flood water.

Children

Parents should help children avoid waterborne illness. Do not allow children to play in flood water areas, wash children's hands frequently (always before meals), and do not allow children to play with flood-water contaminated toys that have not been disinfected. Disinfect toys using a solution of one cup of bleach in 5 gallons of water.

Illness

People who become ill after drinking contaminated water should see a medical professional. The usual symptoms of illness from drinking unsafe water include upset stomach, vomiting, diarrhea, fever, cramps and headaches. Children (especially infants), the elderly and those who have existing health conditions or severely compromised immune systems are at greater risk of serious illness.

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